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Convention of Delegates

F R O M T H E

A B O L I T I O N S O C I E T I E S

Established in different Parts of the United States,

A S S E M B L E D A T

P H I L A D E L P H I A,

ON THE FIRST DAY OF JANUARY, ONE THOUSAND SEVEN
HUNDRED AND NINETY-FOUR, AND CONTINUED, BY
ADJOURNMENTS, UNTIL THE SEVENTH DAY
OF THE SAME MONTH, INCLUSIVE.



P H I L A D E L P H I A:

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M I N U T E S

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P R O C E E D I N G S

O F A

Convention of Delegates.

IN Convention of Delegates, from the Societies established, in different parts of the United States, for promoting the abolition of slavery, assembled at the City Hall, in the city of Philadelphia, January 1, 1794, it appeared, by the credentials delivered in, that the following persons had been duly appointed to represent their respective Societies in this Convention:

Connecticut Society.

Uriah Tracy.

New-York Society.

Peter Jay Munro,

Moses Rogers,

Thomas Franklin, junior,

William Dunlap.

New

New-Jersey Society.

Joseph Bloomfield,
William Coxe, junior,
John Wistar,
Robert Pearson,
Franklin Davenport.

Pennsylvania Society.

William Rogers,
William Rawle,
Samuel Powel Griffiths,
Robert Patterson,
Samuel Coates,
Benjamin Rush.

Delaware Society.

Warner Mifflin,
Isaiah Rowland,
Joseph Hodgson,
John Pemberton.

Wilmington Society (State of Delaware.)

Joseph Warner,
Isaac H. Starr,
Robert Coram.

Maryland Society.

Samuel Sterett,
James Winchester,
Joseph Townsend,
Adam Fonerdon,
Jesse Hollingsworth.

Chester-town Society (State of Maryland.)

Joseph Wilkinfon,
James Maslin,
Abraham Ridgely.

Of whom the following appeared and took
their seats, *viz.*

Uriah Tracy,
Thomas Franklin, junior,
William Dunlap,
Joseph Bloomfield,
William Coxe, junior,
Robert Pearson,
William Rogers,
William Rawle,
Samuel Powel Griffitts,
Robert Patterson,
Samuel Coates,
Benjamin Rush,
Warner Mifflin,
Isaiah Rowland,
Joseph Hodgson,
John Pemberton,
Joseph Warner,
Isaac H. Starr,
Samuel Sterett,
Joseph Townsend,
Joseph Wilkinfon,
Abraham Ridgely.

Joseph Bloomfield was elected President of
the Convention.

John

John M'Cree, one of the Secretaries of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, was appointed Secretary, and Joseph Fry, Door-keeper.

Agreed, That all questions, which shall come before this Convention, be decided by a majority of the votes of the members present.

Benjamin Rush, William Dunlap, Samuel Sterett, William Rawle, and Warner Mifflin, were appointed a committee to report the objects proper for the consideration of this Convention, and the best plan for carrying the same into execution.

Adjourned.

JANUARY SECOND.

Adam Fonerdon and Jesse Hollingsworth, two of the Delegates from the Maryland Society, appeared and took their seats.

Abfalom Baird, delegated to represent the Washington Society in Pennsylvania, appeared, produced his credentials, and took his seat.

A letter, directed to the Convention, from Robert Pleasants, Chairman of the committee of correspondence of the Virginia Society, was presented and read. By this letter it appears, that Samuel Pleasants and Israel Pleasants, of the city of Philadelphia, were appointed to represent that Society, in this Convention;

Convention; or, in case of their declining or being prevented from acting, the Convention were left at liberty to nominate two other members as their representatives.

Whereupon;

Resolved, That as information, and an unreserved comparison of one another's sentiments, relative to the important cause in which we are severally engaged, are our principal objects; and as the persons appointed by the Virginia Society, are not citizens of that state, nor members of that Society—to admit them, or, according to their proposal, for us to elect others as their representatives, would be highly improper.

In this letter was enclosed an authentic account of several vessels lately fitted out in Virginia, for the African slave-trade.

The President was directed to acknowledge the receipt of this letter, to inform the Virginia Society of the resolution of the Convention thereon, and to thank them for the above interesting information.

Benjamin Rush, from the committee appointed to bring in a report on the objects proper for the consideration of this Convention, and the best plan for carrying the same into execution, produced one, which being considered and amended, was adopted as follows, *viz.*

First,

First, That a memorial be presented to Congress, praying that Body to prohibit, by law, the citizens of the United States, from carrying on a commerce, in slaves, for the supply of foreign nations; and, also, to prohibit foreigners from fitting their ships in the ports of the United States, for the purpose of carrying on the slave-trade.

Second, That memorials and petitions be presented to the Legislatures of such of the States as have not yet passed laws to prohibit the importation of slaves—to enact laws for that purpose; and, also, to the Legislatures of the individual States—to prevent slaves from being forcibly carried away; and to grant to such of them as have been, or may be emancipated, such a participation in civil privileges, as, by the diffusion of knowledge among them, they may, from time to time, be qualified to enjoy.

Third, That addresses be sent to the different Abolition Societies, recommending to them to continue their zeal and exertions, in behalf of such of our African brethren as are yet in bondage; also, to use their utmost endeavours to have the children of the free and other Africans, instructed in common literature—in the principles of virtue and religion, and afterwards in useful mechanical arts; thereby to prepare them for becoming good citizens of the United States.

Fourth

Fourth, That an address be written, and published to the citizens of the United States, to impress upon them, in the most forcible manner, the obligations of justice, humanity and benevolence towards our African brethren, whether in bondage or free, and to request their concurrence with us in all the objects of the present Convention.

Fifth, That it be recommended to the different Abolition Societies, to appoint Delegates to meet in Convention, at Philadelphia, on the first Wednesday of January, 1795, and on the same day, in every year afterwards, until the great objects of their original association be accomplished.

The following committees were then appointed, *viz.*

William Rawle, William Rogers, and William Dunlap, to prepare a memorial to Congress, as proposed in the first section of the above report.

Samuel Sterett, William Rawle, and William Dunlap, to prepare memorials to the different Legislatures, as proposed in the second section.

Samuel P. Griffiths, William Coxe, junior, and Abraham Ridgely, to prepare addresses to the several Abolition Societies, as proposed in the third section.

Benjamin

Benjamin Rush, Warner Mifflin, and Isaac H. Starr, to prepare an address to the citizens of the United States, as proposed in the fourth section.

Adjourned.

JANUARY THIRD.

Samuel Sterett, from the committee appointed to prepare memorials to the Legislatures of the different states, presented two essays; one to be presented to the Legislatures of such of the states, as have not passed laws to prohibit the importation of slaves; and the other to be presented to the Legislatures of the individual states, who have not abolished domestic slavery; which were read, and ordered to lie on the table.

Adjourned.

JANUARY FOURTH.

Samuel P. Griffitts, from the committee appointed for the purpose, reported an address to the different Abolition Societies; which was read, and ordered to lie on the table.

Benjamin Rush, from the committee appointed for the purpose, reported an address to the citizens of the United States; which was read, and ordered to lie on the table.

The

The memorial, addrested to the states who have not enacted laws to prohibit the importation of slaves, was read a second time, and, being considered, was, after some amendments, agreed to as follows, *viz.*

To the *of the*
State of

The memorial and petition of the Delegates, from the several Societies, formed in different parts of the United States, for promoting the abolition of slavery, in Convention assembled at Philadelphia, on the first day of January, 1794.

Respectfully shew,

THAT, actuated by a desire to vindicate the honour of the United States, the rights of man, and the dignity of human nature, the Abolition Societies, in various and distant parts of the Union, have delegated your memorialists, to consider of, and endeavour to promote, such plans as may tend to diminish the number of slaves in the United States, meliorate their situation, and eventually eradicate an evil, entailed upon us by our ancestors; which must, as long as it exists, be considered as a dishonourable stain upon a country, the basis of whose political happiness is man's equal rights.

We, therefore, earnestly entreat you, to take into consideration the propriety and necessity

cessity of enacting laws, to prohibit the importation of slaves into your state, from any foreign country, or from any neighbouring state.

We presume not here to expatiate, to the Representatives of an enlightened people, on the injustice, immorality, and dreadful tendency of the slave-trade; fully persuaded that men, in your respectable situation, are thinking men, and that all who reflect on this subject must have been long convinced of these truths. But, Gentlemen, the evil exists, and surely it is well worthy of your consideration; it is an evil of great magnitude, and to prevent its growth, and gradually to destroy it, is an object of weighty import.

Permit us then respectfully to suggest, that the first step to be taken is to prohibit an accumulation of the evil, by any further importation. Many of your sister states have adopted this measure, and have not found any disadvantages arising therefrom. On the contrary, they have shewn their approbation of the measure, on trial, by enacting subsequent laws, giving to the first additional force and efficacy.

Your memorialists therefore hope, that, on consideration, you will add your state to the number of those which prohibit the importation of slaves; and thus contribute to abolish a practice, no less destructive to the interests of the United States, than to the general cause of humanity.

Instead

Instead of the last paragraph, the following was agreed to be substituted in the memorial to be presented to the Legislature of South Carolina, *viz.*

Your memorialists therefore hope, that, on consideration, you will make perpetual the law which you have already enacted for the above purpose; thereby adding your state to the number of those which totally prohibit the importation of slaves, and thus contribute to abolish a practice, no less destructive to the interests of the United States, than to the general cause of humanity.

The memorial addressed to the individual states, who have not yet abolished domestic slavery, was read a second time; and, being considered and amended, was agreed to as follows, *viz.*

To the *of the*
State of

The memorial and petition of the Delegates from the several Societies, formed in different parts of the United States, for promoting the abolition of slavery, in Convention assembled at Philadelphia, on the first day of January, 1794.

Respectfully shew,

THAT, having been appointed and convened for the general purposes of considering and endeavouring to suggest the most eligible

eligible plans for promoting the abolition of slavery; and, where its suppression cannot be obtained, to effect its alleviation, they have been unavoidably led to contemplate, how much remains in the power of the Legislature to perform.

It has, therefore, become their duty, respectfully to represent to your House, some of those evils which are still permitted to continue; and, in the name of fellow-men, to solicit its protection, its assistance, and its justice.

Some of the principal evils, foremost in the group of calamities, incident to the practice of slavery, your memorialists take the liberty of specifying.

Negroes, considered merely as subjects of property, are frequently carried off, by force, from their dearest connections, and transported to places, where even the severity of their former bondage is encreased; where a new climate, rigid laws, and despotic manners, render their despair complete.

As subjects of property, they likewise become the objects of plunder; and the evils already mentioned, are aggravated by the violence with which they are executed.

Until a radical abolition of slavery itself, by exploding the general opinion, that the colour of a man is evidence of his deprivation of the rights of man, shall afford more
 effectual

effectual security, it is presumed, that the legislative protection of absolute prohibitions, and of adequate penalties, may be reasonably expected.

The voice of reason, and the impulse of humanity, always at war with injustice, gradually tend to the emancipation of slaves; but laws, often made in earlier times, or for different objects, occasionally interpose between the intention and the act. To enumerate those obstacles to individual emancipation which still remain, sometimes obvious, and sometimes concealed in the mass of municipal regulations, would exceed the reasonable bounds of the present application; but, with a knowledge of their existence, and a sense of their injustice, your memorialists respectfully unite a request, that individual emancipation may, if not promoted by encouragements, at least be relieved from incidental penalties.

Yet, in breaking the fetters, and removing the sorrows of slavery, what do we effect, if the new-made man is relieved from the power of one, only to be sensible of his hopeless inferiority to all? As the opinions of men continue to be regulated, we know, that the negro has little to expect from the distribution of public functions;—still there are certain rights, not privileges, certain claims, not favours, to which, we conceive, legislative justice might safely admit him.

Of

Of what use is his hard-earned property, if the law does not spread its defence around him? Or, how is his liberty secured, if he loses little more than the name of a slave? Donations so ineffectual, and benevolence so incomplete, can only excite dissatisfaction, and suppress industry. To acquire an useful member of the community, we should hold up to his view a participation in its privileges. We promote industry, by rewarding it, and encourage knowledge, by rendering it the means of perceiving happiness.

In addition to the objects already mentioned, your memorialists, therefore, respectfully solicit the Legislature to grant to such as have been, or may be emancipated, such a participation in civil privileges, as, by the diffusion of knowledge among them, they may, from time to time, be qualified to enjoy.

Instead of the three last paragraphs, the following was agreed to be substituted, in the memorial to be presented to the several Legislatures of the states of Delaware, New-Jersey, New-York, Connecticut, and Rhode-Island, *viz.*

Our present application to the Legislature of _____ terminates with these requests:

We have observed, and we acknowledge, with pleasure, the liberality of its constitution, and the humanity of its laws.

As

As the prejudices, which those laws were originally intended to combat, are gradually dispelled, their useful effects will become more obvious and permanent. Liberality and humanity will extend from the archives of your state to the practice of your citizens. It will be confessed, that none of your provisions, avowing and securing the rights of fellow-creatures, ought to excite repentance or discourage imitation. It will be found, that an increase of the useful qualities of the African citizen, will keep pace with the kindness and protection of which he partakes; and, in future, the dignified office of the Legislature, will not be to repeal or restrain, but to enlarge and enforce, the provisions in his favour.

And in the memorial to be presented to the Legislature of the state of Pennsylvania, the following paragraph was agreed to be substituted, *viz.*

To the Legislature of *that state* which; in favour of the unhappy African, first dispelled the clouds of prejudice, and first extended the hand of consolation, no further request, on our part, at present, remains. We have observed, and we acknowledge with pleasure, the liberality of its constitution, and the humanity of its laws. We have seen that the effect
of

of none of their provisions, avowing and securing the rights of fellow-creatures, has excited repentance, or discouraged imitation; we have witnessed an increase of the useful qualities in the African citizen, keeping pace with the kindness and protection of which he partakes; and we have found the legislative attention employed, not in repealing and restraining, but in enlarging and enforcing, its former provisions in his favour.

JANUARY SIXTH.

William Rogers, from the committee appointed for the purpose, reported a memorial to Congress, which was read, and ordered to lie on the table.

The address to the Abolition Societies was read a second time, and, being considered and amended, was agreed to as follows, *viz.*

*To the Society for
promoting the abolition of Slavery, &c.*

IT is with peculiar pleasure we inform you, that the Convention of Delegates, from most of the Abolition Societies formed in the United States, met in this city, have, with much unanimity, gone through the business which came before them. The advantages to be derived from this meeting are so evident

dent, that we have agreed earnestly to recommend to you, that a similar meeting be annually convened, until the great object of our association—the liberty of our fellow-men—shall be fully and unequivocally established.

To obtain this important end, we conceive that it is proper, constantly to have in view the necessity of using our utmost and unremitting endeavours to abolish slavery, and to protect and meliorate the condition of the enslaved, and of the emancipated. The irresistible, though silent progress of the principles of true philosophy, will do much for us; but, placed in a situation well adapted to promote these principles, it surely becomes us to improve every occasion of forwarding the great designs of our institutions. For this purpose, we think it proper to request you to unite with us, in the most strenuous exertions, to effect a compliance with the laws in favour of emancipation; and, where these laws are deficient, respectful applications to the State-Legislatures should not be discontinued, however unsuccessful they may prove.—Let us remember, for our consolation and encouragement in these cases, that, although interest and prejudice may oppose, yet the fundamental principles of our government, as well as the progressive and rapid influence of reason and religion, are in our favour—
and

and let us never be discouraged by a fear of the event, from performing any task of duty, when clearly pointed out; for it is an undoubted truth—that no good effort can ever be entirely lost.

While contemplating the great principles of our associations, we cannot refrain from recommending to your attention the propriety of using your endeavours to form, as circumstances may require, Abolition Societies in your own, and in the neighbouring states; as, for want of the concurrence of others, the good intentions and efforts of many an honest and zealous individual, are often defeated.

But, while we wish to draw your attention to these objects, there is another which we cannot pass over. We are all too much accustomed to the reproaches of the enemies of our cause, on the subject of the ignorance and crimes of the Blacks, not to wish that they were ill-founded. And though, to us, it is sufficiently apparent, that this ignorance, and these crimes, are owing to the degrading state of slavery; yet, may we not, with confidence, attempt to do away the reproach?—Let us use our endeavours to have the children of the emancipated, and even of the enslaved Africans, instructed in common literature—in the principles of virtue and religion, and in those mechanic arts which will
keep

keep them most constantly employed, and, of course, will less subject them to idleness and debauchery; and thus prepare them for becoming good citizens of the United States: a privilege and elevation to which we look forward with pleasure, and which we believe can be best merited by habits of industry and virtue.

We shall transmit you an exact copy of our proceedings, with the different memorials and addresses which to us have appeared necessary at this time; and would recommend to you the propriety of giving full powers to the Delegates who are to meet in the year 1795; believing, that the business of that Convention will be rendered more easy and more extensively useful, if you send, by your Representatives, certified copies of the constitution and laws of your Society, and of all the laws existing in your state concerning slavery, with such facts relative to this business, as may ascertain the respective situation of slavery, and of the Blacks in general.

The address to the citizens of the United States was read a second time, and, being considered and amended, was agreed to as follows, *viz.*

To

To the Citizens of the United States.

The address of the Delegates from the several Societies, formed in different parts of the United States, for promoting the abolition of slavery, in Convention assembled at Philadelphia, on the first day of January, 1794.

Friends and Fellow-citizens,

UNITED to you by the ties of citizenship, and partakers with you of the blessings of a free government, we take the liberty of addressing you upon a subject, highly interesting to the credit and prosperity of the United States.

It is the glory of our country to have originated a system of opposition to the commerce in that part of our fellow-creatures, who compose the nations of Africa.

Much has been done by the citizens of some of the states to abolish this disgraceful traffic, and to improve the condition of those unhappy people, whom the ignorance, or the avarice of our ancestors had bequeathed to us as slaves; but the evil still continues, and our country is yet disgraced by laws and practices, which level the creature man with a part of the brute creation.

Many reasons concur in persuading us to abolish domestic slavery in our country.

It

It is inconsistent with the safety of the liberties of the United States.

Freedom and slavery cannot long exist together. An unlimited power over the time, labour, and posterity of our fellow-creatures, necessarily unfits men for discharging the public and private duties of citizens of a republic.

It is inconsistent with sound policy; in exposing the states which permit it, to all those evils which insurrections, and the most resentful war have introduced into one of the richest islands in the West-Indies.

It is unfriendly to the present exertions of the inhabitants of Europe, in favour of liberty. What people will advocate freedom, with a zeal proportioned to its blessings, while they view the purest republic in the world tolerating in its bosom a body of slaves?

In vain has the tyranny of kings been rejected, while we permit in our country a domestic despotism, which involves, in its nature, most of the vices and miseries that we have endeavoured to avoid.

It is degrading to our rank as men in the scale of being. Let us use our reason and social affections for the purposes for which they were given, or cease to boast a pre-eminence over animals, that are unpolluted with our crimes.

But

But higher motives to justice and humanity towards our fellow-creatures remain yet to be mentioned.

Domestic slavery is repugnant to the principles of Christianity. It prostrates every benevolent and just principle of action in the human heart. It is rebellion against the authority of a common FATHER. It is a practical denial of the extent and efficacy of the death of a common SAVIOUR. It is an usurpation of the prerogative of the GREAT SOVEREIGN of the universe, who has solemnly claimed an exclusive property in the souls of men.

But if this view of the enormity of the evil of domestic slavery should not affect us, there is one consideration more which ought to alarm and impress us, especially at the present juncture.

It is a violation of a divine precept of universal justice, which has, in no instance, escaped with impunity.

The crimes of nations, as well as of individuals, are often designated in their punishments; and we conceive it to be no forced construction, of some of the calamities which now distress or impend our country, to believe that they are the measure of evils, which we have meted to others.

The ravages committed upon many of our fellow-citizens by the Indians, and the depredations upon the liberty and commerce of
others

others of the citizens of the United States by the Algerines, both unite in proclaiming to us, in the most forcible language, “ to loose the bands of wickedness, to break every yoke, to undo heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free.”

We shall conclude this address by recommending to you,

First, To refrain immediately from that species of rapine and murder which has improperly been softened with the name of the African trade. It is Indian cruelty, and Algerine piracy, in another form.

Secondly, To form Societies, in every state, for the purpose of promoting the abolition of the slave-trade, of domestic slavery, the relief of persons unlawfully held in bondage, and for the improvement of the condition of Africans, and their descendants amongst us.

The Societies, which we represent, have beheld, with triumph, the success of their exertions, in many instances, in favour of their African brethren; and, in a full reliance upon the continuance of divine support and direction, they humbly hope, their labours will never cease, while there exists a single slave in the United States.

JANUARY,

JANUARY SEVENTH.

The memorial to Congress was read a second time, and, being considered and amended, was agreed to as follows, *viz.*

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled.

The memorial and petition of the Delegates from the several Societies, formed in different parts of the United States, for promoting the abolition of slavery, in Convention assembled at Philadelphia, on the first day of January, 1794.

Respectfully shew,

THAT your memorialists, having been appointed, by various Societies, in different parts of the Union, for the benevolent purpose of endeavouring to alleviate or suppress some of the miseries of their fellow-creatures, deem it their duty to approach the Congress of the United States with a respectful representation of certain evils,—the unauthorised acts of a few, but injurious to the interest and reputation of all.

America, dignified by being the first in modern times, to assert and defend the equal rights of man, suffers her fame to be tarnished, and her example to be weakened, by a cruel
commerce,

commerce, carried on from some of her ports, for the supply of foreign nations with African slaves.

To enumerate the horrors incident to this inhuman traffic, of which all the worst passions of mankind form the principal materials, would be unnecessary, when we offer to prove its existence.

Nor is it requisite to consume much of your valuable time in the endeavour to prove it a national injury.

While it exposes the lives and the morals of our seamen to peculiar danger, it renders all complaints of retaliation unjust; for those who deprive others of their liberty, for the benefit of foreign countries, cannot reasonably murmur, if, by other foreign nations, they are deprived of their own.

True it is, that the captivity at Algiers is not without a hope, and that the slavery of the West-Indies terminates only with existence; but, in proportion as that to which we are accessory is more severe, the duty of desisting from it becomes more urgent.

Your memorialists observe, and mention with pleasure, that this venal cruelty is at present confined to a few ports, and a few persons. Hence it becomes more easy to destroy a degrading exception from the general dignity

dignity of our commerce, and to restore our citizens to their former fame, of preferring the spirit of freedom to the delusions of interest.

An additional reason for the legislative interference, now requested, arises from the natural consequence of the facts already suggested.

Foreigners, seduced by the example, and believing that they may commit without reproach, what American citizens commit with impunity, avail themselves of our ports to fit out their vessels for the same traffic. Thus we become the accomplices of their offences, and partake of the guilt without the miserable consolation of sharing its profits.

Your memorialists, therefore, trusting that a compliance with their request, will not exceed the constitutional powers of Congress, nor injure the interests or disturb the tranquillity of any part of the Union, respectfully pray, that a law may be passed, prohibiting the traffic carried on by citizens of the United States for the supply of slaves to foreign nations, and preventing foreigners from fitting out vessels for the slave-trade in the ports of the United States.

Resolved, That the President do transmit to Cranville Sharpe, Chairman of the Committee of the London Society, formed for the

the purpose of effecting the abolition of the slave-trade, a copy of the proceedings of this Convention.

That the address directed to be presented to Congress, be signed by the President of this Convention, and attested by the Secretary; and that the same be transmitted, by the President, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

That the addresses to the several Legislatures, be signed and attested as above mentioned; and be transmitted to the respective Presidents; or Speakers, of one branch of the Legislature, or laid before the respective Houses, in such manner as the President of this Convention shall find expedient.

That the address to the people of the United States, be signed and attested as above mentioned; and that the same be published in one or more of the newspapers in each state; and that Uriah Tracy, William Dunlap, William Coxe, junior, Samuel Coates, Joseph Warner, Abraham Ridgley, and Joseph Townsend, be a committee to procure the publication thereof, and to transmit the addresses to the Abolition Societies.

That one thousand five hundred copies of the minutes and proceedings of the Convention be printed; that one hundred copies be sent to each of the Abolition Societies now established; and that Samuel Coates, Samuel P. Griffiths,

P. Griffiths, and Robert Patterson, be a committee to superintend the publication and distribution of the proceedings of this Convention.

Published by order of the Convention,

JOHN M^cCREE, *Secretary.*

Philadelphia, January 7th. 1794.







